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8 AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND OPEN HOUSE

9 BROWN MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH

10 484 WASHINGTON AVENUE

11 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11238

12 TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 2009

13 6:00 P.M.

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0002

1 P R E S E N T:

2 Joyce Armstrong

3 Ronald Bartholomew

4 Dyane E. Chisolm

5 R. Malika Owusu-Hassan

6 Baba Mpho Aka Shanto

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1           P R O C E E D I N G S

2                   (Time noted: 6:00 p.m.)

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4           MR. SHANTO: First of all, I would like  
5 to acknowledge the most high creator for the  
6 ancestors and the Orishes.

7           I am very pleased to know that the  
8 government is continuing to make certain that the  
9 presence of the African Burial Ground is not only  
10 kept, but is being brought to the consciousness of  
11 the young generation, the old and everybody.

12           Indeed, I'm also pleased to know that  
13 efforts are being made to reach the community so  
14 that the community can be involved in helping in  
15 the preservation of the African burial site.

16           I like the programs that they have been  
17 running so far, especially with the tourists they  
18 have had down there. But in terms of some of the  
19 things that I would like to see, more partnerships  
20 with some of the organizations in the community;  
21 especially the people of the Sun Collective and  
22 Medgar Evers College, which has been doing a

23 program that is called Tribute to the Ancestors,  
24 and this program started 20 years ago at Medgar  
25 Evers as a storytelling event.

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2 And since then, every year, they have  
3 been going down to Coney Island, which is one of  
4 the first places where many of the slave ships  
5 docked. And I think there should be some kind of  
6 collaboration between the African Burial Ground and  
7 the communities involved in maintaining the  
8 presence, paying respect to those ancestor's bones  
9 that are lying in the Atlantic Ocean; because the  
10 Atlantic Ocean truly connects many of our people,  
11 coming not only from Africa, but from Asia, from  
12 Europe, from North and South America.

13 I would also, as part of the activities  
14 and programs that they have been planning, I would  
15 also like to see the drums playing a more important  
16 role in activities.

17 As a matter of fact, for the summer I  
18 know they have a program that supposedly starts in  
19 the summer and ends before the winter. I think it  
20 would be very fitting if they can begin the program  
21 with a drum invocation every year, and close out

22 the program with a drum invocation.

23       The drumming invocation should be  
24 represented with the various drums. I said various  
25 drums. There are drums and drummers from  
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1       African Burial Ground Open House - 6/9/09  
2 throughout the Diaspora, Cuba, the Caribbean,  
3 various parts of Africa.

4       When we think of Africa, I think one of  
5 the most connecting forces to people of African  
6 descent is the drums. So I can see that playing a  
7 very critical important role in bringing about the  
8 collective, in regards to honoring the bones that  
9 are part of the African Burial Ground.

10       I think it was when they were having the  
11 reinternment of the bones they did a program which  
12 was, I think it was 24 hours of performances; and I  
13 think that was a very good program that they did.  
14 I think it should be something that should be  
15 implemented annually. They should have -- I think  
16 it was 24 hours or 48 hours of performances in  
17 tribute to the ancestors.

18       My name is Baba Mpho Aka Shanto, and I'm  
19 part of the people of the Sun Collective, as well  
20 as a member of the Ghana Masquerade Association, as

21 well as a member of the Manumitted Africans of  
22 Guyana.

23 Basically, that's what I would like so  
24 say to you.

25 MS. CHISOLM: I wanted to notate that  
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2 this here program should be put in more boroughs,  
3 not just New York; or should be accessible to  
4 Queens. Because if I hadn't came here today to  
5 this church, my church, I wouldn't never have known  
6 about this, not at all.

7 So where I live in Far Rockaway, I'm  
8 quite sure most of the people do not know anything  
9 about this; and it should be accessible out there  
10 to the different boroughs. It should be advertised  
11 more so we will know about it. I don't know if it  
12 is advertised on TV or the radio, but I didn't hear  
13 anything about it.

14 If I hadn't come here today I wouldn't  
15 have known. I didn't know we even had an African  
16 African Burial Ground, and that's bad. So I'm  
17 looking for more advertisements. There should be  
18 more advertisements.

19 By being advertised within the different

20 boroughs or communities, it should be where it  
21 could be accessed, more access for the senior  
22 citizens to be able to get over there into  
23 Manhattan. It should be like a bus or some kind of  
24 program where they can use a school bus, a yellow  
25 bus, to get over to Manhattan in order to see this.

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2 I would like more advertisements done on  
3 this, because this is really shocking. I never  
4 even knew we had this. This is really interesting.

5 Basically, that's it, as far as  
6 advertisement is concerned and the senior citizens.  
7 I didn't know about it. Live and learn in New York  
8 City.

9 MR. BARTHOLOMEW: First question:

10 Preserve it by federal protection, federal laws as  
11 mandated, and stay in effect for quite some time.

12 Question 2: The current program, to me,  
13 is very intriguing by the fact of the matter that  
14 they were able to go forth and dig up our ancestors  
15 and use technology, use scientists, to preserve  
16 those former slaves that were buried underneath  
17 Manhattan.

18 The program itself I think is a good

19 contribution to the African community. I wouldn't  
20 say African American, because there are so many  
21 different names they would like to apply to us; the  
22 Diaspora.

23 Nevertheless, the program I think, like  
24 I indicated, the key component to the younger  
25 generation and for others like myself who were not  
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2 aware of the circumstances.

3 To continue doing research and to  
4 continue finding out other locations or sites that  
5 may be similar, and cohesively bring them together  
6 and create a larger base, a manifest database  
7 system that will be accessible to kids and the  
8 communities for access to this kind of information.

9 Question 4: Recognizing and seeing if  
10 they should consider development of different  
11 facilities. This is needed. Basically, if they  
12 have more artifacts or other historical items that  
13 may not be able to be allotted in that particular  
14 setting, then yes, expand, if it is needed to be.

15 Question 5: Bringing it to people who  
16 may not be able to visit the African Burial Ground.  
17 I would say, how can it be accessible to all of



18 those? By the world-wide web, that's the greatest  
19 thing right now for quite some time.  
20       The information superhighway, bringing  
21 that to the forefront of the world-wide-web, making  
22 information more accessible to your local library,  
23 that sort; and having, probably, like BCAT, local  
24 television shows.  
25       Question 6: I'll bypass that question.

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2       A partnership. I think a partnership  
3 that they should pursue -- this type of site should  
4 not be based on tourism. It should not be  
5 something put out there to attract tourists. This  
6 has historical -- it's a big historical story and  
7 it is a very important part of our history.  
8 Therefore, it shouldn't be -- I don't think that  
9 they should base it on a tourist attraction.  
10       If there was a partnership, pursue  
11 partnerships, it should be education. That's the  
12 whole theme here, is to educate those who may not  
13 have known about what took place, what transpired.  
14       So moving forward, I think the type of  
15 partnership that they should collaborate with is  
16 education institutions, and that sort.

17 Like Question 1, federally protected and  
18 funded as needed and insuring you have sufficient  
19 staff to insure the integrity and the security of  
20 that actual site.

21 Public awareness by media outlets:  
22 Broadcasting it on local news stations, cable  
23 stations, PBS Channel 13, you name it; CNN, major  
24 airways that you could bring this information to.

25 Skip 10. That's it.

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2 MS. ARMSTRONG: The preserve and  
3 protect, I really don't have an issue with that.  
4 Because it is in the federal building, I feel that  
5 it is going to be preserved just because it is part  
6 of the National Park Service. I'm comfortable with  
7 that aspect of it; glad of that.

8 The other thing is, what do you think  
9 about the current programs? Mostly the ongoing  
10 educational and interpretation part in the tours  
11 that they give, since I volunteer, I've been there  
12 so I have seen many, many tour groups. I've heard  
13 lots of tours and tour groups.

14 I think the current programs are good  
15 and I'm very excited that it is going to be

16 expanded with the interactive center and next year.

17 I just wish that more school groups -- we have lots  
18 of school groups coming.

19 But in this city with so many schools, I  
20 just wish schools could schedule times to come in  
21 and see it. Really, I think children should know  
22 that this place is there and that it exists. And I  
23 don't see as many high school children. I see a  
24 lot of middle school trips and stuff, but not that  
25 many high school children.

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2 So maybe a little more outreach toward  
3 high school kids. And we do get a few college kids  
4 who are working on a thesis and things that are  
5 associated with that. Perhaps even a little more  
6 outreach to the colleges in the city.

7 My suggestions for future programs, in  
8 New York in the last five or six years, you see  
9 tour buses all over the place. If you are a New  
10 Yorker like I am, everywhere. I was wondering how  
11 we could somehow be put on the list for a  
12 particular tour bus and we would be one of the  
13 stops on the tour.

14 I would like to see that happen, because

15 on the tour bus you have people international, as  
16 well as national, that are in the city and would  
17 come and leave and never be aware that this is  
18 here. They see the Statue of Liberty, which is not  
19 that far from the African Burial Ground, or go to  
20 the Indian museum, which is really even closer, and  
21 have no idea that the African Burial Ground is  
22 there. And there's a story to tell. So I would  
23 like to see that outreach.

24       And one of the other things, if it's  
25 possible for somebody to explore, we live in a  
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1       African Burial Ground Open House - 6/9/09  
2 tri-state area. I have seen people and have made  
3 reservations for groups coming in from New Jersey,  
4 not too far in New Jersey. We have Connecticut and  
5 other places, even. I haven't seen one group from  
6 Suffolk County or Nassau County. That's not that  
7 far away, a bus trip into the city. So I don't  
8 know how they could do some outreach to that.

9       Other than that, in the tri-state area,  
10 I would imagine with the National Park Service  
11 being all over the place, what could we do to put  
12 information to the other Park Services, telling  
13 them about the newest member of the National Park

14 Service?

15 Question 5: About making it meaningful

16 to students in Nigeria or Paris or, I guess,

17 international. I guess by the web, putting it out

18 on the web; everything is on the web. I don't know

19 what else they could do about that.

20 I didn't think about businesses, but

21 maybe not so much now that we're so financially

22 strapped, we're so close to Wall Street we could

23 have gotten those groups down there, right, when

24 they did conferences and stuff, right? This is a

25 little entertainment type of thing. I don't know

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2 how we can partner with them.

3 I'm totally committed and I volunteer.

4 The day I retired I walked across the street to 26

5 Federal Plaza and I became a volunteer. I've been

6 there volunteering for three or four years, and

7 I'll continue to do that in any way I can.

8 MS. OWUSU-HASSAN: I'm a native New

9 Yorker. I remember when they first unearthed the

10 remains at the African Burial Ground, when they

11 first found the African Burial Ground; and I was

12 like absolutely excited and ecstatic.

13 I was born and raised in New York. I'm  
14 aware of various monuments and historical sites in  
15 America in different places, but not in New York  
16 City. Even in New York State, they have Sojourner  
17 Truth. She was born in New Paltz, New York, and  
18 there they have several monuments in recognition of  
19 her.

20 But in New York City, it is like there  
21 are very few things. Anyway, I was absolutely  
22 ecstatic when I found out about the African Burial  
23 Ground and the initial ceremonies and things of  
24 that nature. I was there. And it was just  
25 fabulous, it was very intriguing. It was very  
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2 revitalizing. It was just like a reconnection; a  
3 reconnection to days gone by, times that you never  
4 knew about but on some level are connected to.

5 I had registered to volunteer a number  
6 of years ago. I went to the orientation. However,  
7 the time restraints being what they are, I was  
8 never able to fulfill that commitment. But times  
9 move on, conditions and things change, and I'm glad  
10 to say that at this point in my life I am able and  
11 willing to volunteer to try to make a difference in

12 terms of the recognition, the acknowledgement and  
13 the awareness of the African Burial Ground.

14 I think that we as New Yorkers, no  
15 matter what our ethnic background, and we as  
16 Americans need to be aware of this monumental site  
17 that we have in our midst. Considering that Wall  
18 Street is there, the financial district, the  
19 political center and the business center; and New  
20 York is of course the center of the world; and here  
21 you have a site where Africans from centuries ago  
22 were buried, and this is just an historical  
23 phenomenon.

24 For various people from academia, for  
25 the sociologist, for the ethnographer, for the  
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2 psychologist, you can go on and on; not to mention  
3 the average American, just to be able to make that  
4 connection.

5 I think it is important that we do what  
6 we can to make this knowledge available to all  
7 Americans, and everyone on the planet. Anyone who  
8 comes to New York City should make it a definite  
9 stop on their sightseeing tour.

10 (Time noted: 8:00 p.m.)

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2 CERTIFICATION

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4 I, Jeffrey Shapiro, a

5 Shorthand Reporter and Notary Public, within and

6 for the State of New York, do hereby certify that I

7 reported the proceedings in the within-entitled

8 matter, on Tuesday, June 9, 2009, at Browne

9 Memorial Baptiste, 484 Washington Avenue, Brooklyn,



10 New York, and that this is an accurate  
11 transcription of these proceedings.

12               IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have  
13 hereunto set my hand this \_\_\_\_\_ day of  
14 \_\_\_\_\_, 2009.

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17               JEFFREY SHAPIRO

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